



## How we made a difference in 2009:

### Administrative Office of the Courts Activity Summary

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#### Child Support Collaborative Project

Through the Child Support Collaborative Project, the AOC provides an ongoing collaborative association between the judiciary and the Division of Child Support Services (“DCSS”) to address child support issues. The project also supplements the work of DCSS, such as when conflicts arise in DCSS’ responsibilities. During 2009, some of the highlights and the impact of this Project include:

- Overseeing the revision of the Child Support Guidelines (O.C.G.A. §19-6-15) to include a clearer and less limiting low income deviation when calculating a final child support obligation amount.
- The Child Support Collaborative Staff worked with a task force in designing and making the appropriate changes to the child support calculators which impact every child support case in the State of Georgia. The Collaborative Project hosts the child support calculators. Outreach and training efforts included re-designing a website to provide online access and understanding; chairing a statewide training that was attended by approximately 200 persons; providing instruction for approximately 300 family lawyers; specialized instruction to DCSS managers and managers of Family Law Information Centers statewide; and the training of approximately 40 Superior Court Judges.
- Serving approximately 480 persons throughout 2009 as a helpline for judges, court personnel, mediators, litigants and private attorneys on issues involving statutory issues, access to information, and use of the child support calculators and related tools.
- Providing technical assistance and evaluation services through a contract with an outside expert to establish a pilot site and eventual roll-out locations of Child Sup-

port Problem Solving Courts during 2009. The pilot site in Carroll County had its inaugural court proceeding in January 2009, with a goal of serving approximately thirty participants at a time through this innovative court.

- Convening a multi-agency task force on mandatory genetic testing for paternity and legitimation matters involved with unwed births during late 2009. This is an issue that impacts all unwed births; with records showing that approximately 1/3 of all births are products of unwed parents. In addition, the staff has begun producing written material to help educate the judiciary on the paternity/legitimation process.

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#### Court Services and Communications

- A State Justice Institute (SJI) grant to the Council of Probate Court Judges financed production of a 25 minute public education video for use in local probate courts. The video presents a guide for citizens engaged in guardianship proceedings for minors or adults.
- Improved Customer Service to Probate, Magistrate and Municipal Court Judges. Customer assistance requests are now organized and tracked electronically. More than 150 requests for assistance are handled monthly by staff for these groups.
- A program for high school students entitled “The Color of Justice” was presented in the Appalachian Judicial Circuit on October 11, 2009. Students from Fannin County High School attended the day-long presentation featuring panel discussions with local judges and other court system professionals. The program is a project of the Georgia Commission on Access and Fairness.

- On-line and print versions of the *Georgia Courts Journal* were produced by the Communications staff. The *Journal* has been a feature publication for Georgia judges since formation of the Administrative Office of the Courts in 1973.

### Highlight: Publications “Go Green”

In 2009, the AOC shifted its publication focus from printed documents to electronic publishing. AOC standard publications *The Annual Report on the Work of the Georgia Courts*, the *Georgia Courts Journal*, and “Your Guide to the Georgia Courts” were published on our website in “printer-friendly” versions and delivered electronically via listserv to subscribers. The e-newsletter AOC On Balance, a look at how the AOC is working for the judiciary and public, was introduced in March 2009.

Two publications that were printed included the *Georgia Courts Directory*, a directory of judges, court personnel, and related judicial agencies, and “Your Guide to the Georgia Courts” a popular brochure which explains the workings of the judicial branch including the jurisdiction of each class of court.

How “Green” did we go?

FY 2008 44,700 pieces printed

FY 2009 12,275 pieces printed

- Completed the physical move of all items associated with the closure of the Macon Office and relocation to Headquarters.
- Closed out Fiscal year 2009 and completed all processes associated with the year-end audit.
- Reorganized to better meet the needs of financial reporting over Grants.
- Currently in the process of modifying and testing, in conjunction with the IT division, an electronic time management system.

### General Counsel: Legal

- In Fiscal Year 2009, the AOC Legal Department handled contracts or agreements totaling over \$6,000,000. The AOC Legal Department is primarily responsible for the drafting, negotiation and termination of all contracts and other legal agreements with the AOC and other judicial agencies including the Georgia Courts Automation Commission (GCAC), the Judicial Council Board of Court Reporting, and various Commissions and Councils, and:
- Significant research projects included updating various bench books, including the Georgia Public Health Law Bench Book.
- This year the staff played an integral part in assisting the Georgia State Attorney General’s office with its representation of the judiciary in litigation and investigations in federal and state courts.

- Through the AOC, the Judicial Council Domestic Violence Committee distributed grant funds to Georgia nonprofits that provide free civil legal services to over 4,000 impoverished victims of family violence and their children. Funding is appropriated by the General Assembly.

### Financial Administration Division

Financial Administration serves several Judicial agencies with over 170 projects including the Judicial Council, Administrative Office of the Courts, various councils of court judges, Commission on Interpreters, Board of Court Reporters, Office of Dispute Resolution, Judicial Qualifications Commission, Institute of Continuing Judicial Education, Appellate Resource Center, Council of Juvenile Court Judges, Judicial Administrative Districts of the Superior Courts, Supreme Court and the Council of Superior Court Judges.

## General Counsel: Regulatory Operations

The Regulatory Operations staff provides day to day oversight and contract management, serving as the AOC's Terminal Agency Coordinator, and performs site visits and data analysis to grantees receiving the civil legal services for domestic violence victim grant.

**Board of Court Reporting.** The Board regulates 1,108 court reporters and 120 registered court reporting firms and this year handled 37 complaints against court reporters.

**Commission on Interpreters.** The Commission on Interpreters is a member of the National Center of State Courts Consortium for Language Access in the Courts.

- The Commission regulates 139 licensed court interpreters, conducted training and written examinations four times this year for an average of thirty prospective interpreters, and conducted Oral Certification Exams for approximately 75 prospective. Currently the Commission regulates interpreters in 12 designated spoken languages: Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian, Cantonese, Haitian-Creole, Hindi/Urdu, Japanese, Mandarin, Persian/Farsi, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, and Spanish.

- During Fiscal Year 2009, the Commission licensed 48 court interpreters, 8 certified, 39 conditionally approved, and 1 registered. Georgia also acquired its first licensed Hindi/Urdu court interpreter.

**County and Municipal Probation Advisory Council (CMPAC).** CMPAC promotes public safety by regulating 35 private probations companies and 64 city or county probation programs which combined serve 755 courts and supervise approximately 325,000 misdemeanor probationers. These probation providers collected \$118.6 million in fines and surcharges and ensured performance of 3,852,506 community services hours in Fiscal Year 2009. CMPAC regulation included responding to complaints and 110 on-site compliance reviews (including 1190 employment eligibility checks) for CMPAC's two-year regulatory cycle, which concluded in September 2009.

## Justice for Children

The Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children (formerly known as the Child Placement Project) was created in 1995 to assess and improve court proceedings involving abused and neglected children in our courts. The Committee on Justice for Children is staffed by the Georgia Administrative Office of the Courts and funded by federal Court Improvement Project (CIP) grant funds from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

Efforts undertaken by the Committee and staff for Justice for Children in 2009 include:

- improving the process of appealing termination of parental rights cases.
- improving the quality of representation of children, parents and the agency.
- defining and implementing a set of child outcome measures for counties and circuits in deprivation cases; hosting community Justice for Children summits in over 30 judicial circuits (100 counties).

### Highlight: Cold Case Project

The Supreme Court of Georgia Committee on Justice for Children is sponsoring the Cold Case Project which was started in April 2009 and slated for completion within a year. This project is being conducted in full partnership and support with the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services and the Georgia Office of the Child Advocate. Eleven attorneys were selected to serve as Supreme Court of Georgia Fellows on the Cold Case Project. These Fellows review cases of children who have been in foster care for an extended period of time, and who appear to be aging out of foster care without attaining permanency. The Fellows make periodic presentations at the Committee on Justice for Children meetings. At the end of the project, the committee will publish a paper based on their findings. Applied Research Services, an Atlanta based company specializing in criminal justice and policy development is the project evaluator.

- hosting a shared database of appropriate child specific case information between the courts and the agency.
- launching a quality assurance review program called the Cold Case project to look at children's cases who have been in foster care for over 2 years.
- exploring the judiciary's role in family preservation.
- providing multiple training opportunities and educational scholarships for judges and attorneys.

More information on Justice for Children is available on [www.gajusticeforchildren.org](http://www.gajusticeforchildren.org) which will take you to the AOC hosted website.

## Planning and Research

### Research

In 2009 topics of special study included:

1. Alternative Dispute Baseline Data for Time to Disposition
2. Alternative Dispute Baseline Data for Revenue Projections
3. Judicial Workload Assessment Committee Report
  - a. Impact of Child Support (GA.L. 2000, p.850) on the Domestic Relations Docket
  - b. Drug Court Participants Time Standards for Staffing and Court Hearings
  - c. Comparison of Style of Case with SSCIS Electronic Reports
  - d. Development of a Standard Probation Revocation Form for Case Count
4. Composition of the Felony Docket
5. Electronic Recordation of Proceedings in State Court
6. Muscogee County Court Filing Report
7. "Rent a Judge" Programs and Time to Disposition
8. Redrafting judicial records retention schedules to bring them into compliance with current record-keeping standards, a project of the Judicial Council Records Retention Committee

## Highlight: Court Emergency Management Committee of the Judicial Council

The Court Emergency Management Committee of the Judicial Council is charged with ensuring that courts are accessible during a natural disaster or public health emergency. Planning and Research helped the committee develop and publish a nationally recognized Pandemic Flu Benchbook for Georgia's judges as well as a Continuity of Operation Plan Appendix for courts to add to their existing local emergency plans. Recently the Pandemic Flu Benchbook was updated to include recent rules and regulations published by the Division of Public Health. State Justice Institute (SJI) grant funds were used to conduct work sessions across the state to assist court officials with drafting public health emergency Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) for their specific courts.

### Planning

Planning and Research has helped local courts, the Council of Municipal Court Judges, Board of Court Reporting and the Commission on Interpreters with their planning, caseload evaluations and business process reviews. Planning also helped facilitate discussion among judges about budgeting in difficult economic times.

## Treatment/Accountability Courts

Georgia judges have embraced the drug court concept of combining treatment for drug addiction and court sanctions to break the cycle of repeat criminal offenses. The forty-one separate drug courts now in operation in the state offer a less costly alternative to incarceration of offenders. More than 3,400 successful drug court graduates attest to the effectiveness of these programs. The AOC administers grant funds to the state's drug courts and oversees standards of operation. The drug court concept continues to expand; it now includes: DUI courts (16), a child support court (1) and mental health courts (12).



## Technology and Operations

The Technology and Operations Division (TOD) of the AOC implements statutory mandates and provides effective technological solutions for courts and agencies throughout the state. TOD supports automation to courts that cannot provide their own, so that all courts have access to software and tools to improve the effective operations of the court. Local and national collaboration has lead to numerous successes in Fiscal Year 2009.

### Highlight: Benefits of Georgia Judicial Exchange (GAJE) E-filing [i]

The Administrative Office of the Courts has partnered with the Division of Child Support Services to create the GAJE system for opening cases.

“It enables us to service the public much more quickly,” says Andy Hudson, an agent with Child Support Services.

“A mother can come in and get results 30-60 days faster,” says Sherita Peeler, a special assistant attorney general.

E-filing has made the process of filing child support much faster and more efficient, and has reduced the hours necessary for filing and storage of documents. E-filing has saved needed money in other areas which include sheriff's gas, travel and additional expenses when serving summons to non-custodial parents. Within the Child Support Services offices, savings have been great, including personnel hours, physical storage, ink, paper and other supplies that were generally used to manually file documents with the clerks' offices.

The GAJE e-filing program is being adopted and implemented throughout Georgia. The program started in 2007 with pilot launches in Washington and Bibb counties and has since been picked up by Chatham, Douglas, Houston, Jefferson, Oglethorpe, Fulton and now Clarke. In this short time span, e-filing of child support cases has provided a proven track record of increasing the efficiency and timeliness of helping to move child support cases through the courts.

*[i] Excerpts from Changes Unseen Continue to Reap Benefits for Washington County After Two Years by Rory Parker - Administrative Office of the Courts (featured in the November 2009 Peach State Dispatch, a newsletter of the Department of Human Resources).*

## Facilities / Infrastructure

TOD manages the network and infrastructure necessary to enable communications, document management, file storage and remote access for AOC employees as well as the administration, support and maintenance of case management solutions for 274 courts.

- VMWare – The implementation of “virtual” servers has reduced the footprint in our data center and cut significant costs related to hardware, licensing and administration.

- Quality Technology Services – A collocation site was implemented to ensure daily backups of the AOC and our courts' information for disaster recovery / business continuity planning.

## Other Applications / Software

Increasing reliance on software applications in the courts and at the AOC has required improvements in access to data and the abilities to report, disseminate and analyze their information.

- Citrix Enabled WMCIS – The Magistrate Court Information System was updated and made available to courts via Citrix (online). This improved support to fifty (50) Magistrate courts, facilitating the maintenance and versioning that was required due to legislative changes and JDX projects.

- NCourt Implementation – To allow for online payments capabilities at the municipal court level, ten courts that utilize the AOC's Traffic Information System (TIPS) were set up to accept credit card processing. This has improved collections at the court and saved personnel time necessary to manage this process at the courthouse.

- Citation Data Access – In a collaborative effort with the Governor's Office of Highway Safety, TOD developed an online query application to report citation information to thirteen (13) different entities that make up the Traffic Records Coordinating Council (TRCC).

- WinTox / COTTS – TOD consulted and implemented the server infrastructure for the Drug Courts in Georgia. The servers are housed and maintained in the AOC's data center in Atlanta and the reporting environment is managed through Crystal Reports.

- Child Support Calculator – An enhanced EXCEL version of the Child Support Calculator was developed

### **Support / Training**

- SSCIS Certification – In a collaborative effort with the Ga. Superior Courts Clerks Cooperative Authority, TOD has been certifying the transmission processes for State and Superior Courts software in compliance with Act No. 716, Ga. L. 2000, p. 850.

- Act. No. 264, Ga. L. 2007, p.554 – All AOC supported case management software was updated to comply with the additional fields required by child custody legislation. Transmissions specifications were defined and implemented to allow for reporting.

- Training – Classes for the Superior, Magistrate and Probate judges were conducted, including topics such as Microsoft Office Suite products, Web tutorials and purchasing PCs.

- The use of online meeting software was introduced to facilitate meetings within the judiciary. This has led to substantial savings in travel and time for all participants.